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When the “New Man” met the “Old Man”: Guevara, Nyerere, and the Roots of Latin-Africanism

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Among the “great men” whose stories have come to dominate grand historical narratives of post-1959 Cuba, Ernesto “Che” Guevara remains a standout, even stand-alone, figure. At the same time, however, even a hero of his stature may be considered a victim of the fragmentation and underdevelopment that—as Michael Bustamante and Jennifer Lambe write in the introduction to this volume—beset “our knowledge of the social, cultural, and political past of revolutionary Cuba.” The challenge, then, becomes one of forging new pathways to understanding that connect across the multiple gaps and divides that characterize the Cuban historical experience. Put more succinctly, it is a matter of finding the missing links. Thus can a historian, faced with a lack of so-called ‘hard’ evidence in the quest to solve a particularly compelling ‘mystery,’ be inspired to act like a detective when confronted with a ‘cold trail,’ which means piecing together a case by tracing back from an action (effect) to its likely inspiration (cause). Above and beyond the capacity to understand human psychology, this type of investigation calls for imagination. And this paper will probe the potentialities that lie within imagination as a research method in order to investigate one of the unexplained conundrums in the history of Cuban foreign relations, namely Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara’s fateful decision to fight with rebel forces in the Congo, when it appeared as though he had elected to do exactly the opposite.

On the one hand, imagination may be seen as bridging the gap between research in the arts and the sciences, to the extent that it highlights the intersection between qualitative techniques and scientific research principles. Many of the greatest advances in science have imagination at their core. And it is generally accepted that we cannot

discover what we do not know, or explain what we do not understand, without the creativity of envisioning what we cannot see. On the other hand, it is possible to see imagination as a natural progression from the affective turn in social and humanities research, in which the consideration of feelings and emotions in human actions has taken on increasing importance over the course of the last decade.¹ The focus on affect and the emotional life-world has extended discussions about culture, subjectivity, identity, and bodies that were begun in critical theory and cultural criticism, particularly by post-structuralists and deconstructionists. What particularly interests me here is how this process has opened up the hypothetical dimensions of lived experience in a way that allows a natural flow of understanding to emerge from imaginative enquiry as a method of doing history, and specifically, in this study, how it elucidates Cuba's role in the global history of decolonization.

Aside from his exploits and achievements as a physician, guerrilla fighter, military strategist, and political thinker, Che Guevara is remembered for being one of revolutionary Cuba's and the global left's greatest dreamers. It was his "African dream," culminating in the ill-fated covert operation in the Congo, which exercised perhaps the

¹ In addition to foundational edited collections like Turner, Jonathan H., and Jan E. Stets, *The Sociology of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ticineto Clough, Patricia, and Jean Halley, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Davidson, Joan, and Liz Bondi and Mike Smith, *Emotional Geographies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); and Harding, Jennifer and E. Deidre Pribram, *Emotions: A Cultural Studies Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009); and books such as Ahmed, Sara, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), Burkitt, Ian, *Emotions and Social Relations* (London, etc.: Sage, 2014), and Wetherell, Margaret, *Affect and Emotion* (London, etc.: Sage, 2012), this period has witnessed the appearance of subject-related academic journals, for example *Emotion, Space and Society* (from 2008), *Emotion Review* (2009), and *Subjectivity* (2008) .

most decisive influence on later Cuban policy for that continent, at the same time that the experience almost destroyed him. As Rafael Rojas indicates in this volume, revolutions are the moments when dream and terror (or hope and horror) collide, and in that regard it can be argued that Guevara has come to symbolically embody the hair-raising 'point of collision' between all that is terrifying and what is sublime about transformations of all kinds (be they political, social, or even personal), as well as those specifically connected to his adopted homeland post-1959. Subsequently, my intention is to draw attention to the cultural reverberations inherent in political revolutions by discussing how the problematic of race and national identity in Cuba intersected with the revolution's policy for Africa as can be seen in the cultural discourse of 'Latin Africa' that first emerged at the time of 'Operation Carlota,' the Cuban military engagement in the Angolan civil war in November 1975.

For the investigative experiment at hand, I propose that we imagine a conversation that might or might not have taken place between Che Guevara and Julius Nyerere, the first president of independent Tanzania, in the capital city of Dar es Salaam during the course of the Argentine's stay there in February 1965. After sketching out a background to Guevara's visit, I will make the case for the imaginary dialogue by moving back and forth between its possible contents and the "evidence" of subsequent events, with a focus on Cuban policy for Africa. The aim of this task is to discover the dynamic qualities of self-consciousness that are present in action: those points of significance that are interwoven into the ongoing meaning and unfolding of personal life, and which, I would like to suggest, may finally guide, shape, and influence political events.

Finally, since so much of African diaspora history is made up of "shadow" lives—discourses and journeys that fall outside of the confines of "official" channels, a history of intimacies and personal ties—this imagined conversation between Guevara and Nyerere may additionally be conceived as a further attempt by the author to theorize aspects of post-revolutionary Cuban diplomatic history within an Africanist frame of reference. Doing so, moreover, decenters Cuban revolutionary history from its own insular exceptionality, staging an exchange in which a representative of Havana's government (in this case an Argentine) takes *in* lessons rather than spreading the island's "superior" example.

Chronicles of a Death Foretold

Often in this type of phenomenological enquiry, we find that meaning appears in a type of narrative form as a theme permeating the experience in question. The theme that appeared in the process of my research for this essay was "the journey," and, in particular, the journey as a transformational experience. We know that Che Guevara undertook a number of important, life-transforming journeys before his death in Bolivia in 1967. He was also an avid chronicler, and so we have been able to read his journals and diaries from some of the most important stages of his journey through life. We recall, for example, *Notas de Viaje*, a record of the great tour of Latin America that he undertook in 1952 with his friend Alberto Granado, which was published in English as *The Motorcycle Diaries* (1995). This travel diary is as important for its testimony of Che's political enlightenment as for the spectacular geographical scenes described within its pages. Of even greater significance for our study, however, was Guevara's recognition that the journey had changed him. Following his return to Argentina, he observed: "The person who wrote these notes died upon stepping once again onto Argentine soil, he who edits and polishes them, 'I,' am not I; at least I am not the same I

was before. That vagabonding through our ‘America’ has changed me more than I thought.”²

Another important chronicle of adventure was Guevara’s diary of guerrilla warfare in Cuba between 1956 and 1958, *Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (1963), in the wake of his fateful meeting with Fidel Castro. In his personal journal of the time, he wrote: “A political occurrence is having met Fidel Castro, the Cuban revolutionary, a young man, intelligent, very sure of himself and of extraordinary audacity; I think there is a mutual sympathy between us.” And it would be this same Fidel who ensured that Cuba was first to publish the diary written during twelve months of the guerrilla campaign in Bolivia, adopting the title *The Secret Papers of a Revolutionary: The Diary of Che Guevara* (1968).

Given this lifetime habit of keeping a diary or journal, it goes without saying that Guevara’s first visit to sub-Saharan Africa between December 1964 and March 1965 was carefully recorded, and his thoughts about the leaders of the newly independent states that he visited inscribed in his notes.³ This is especially so given the importance attached to the tour at both the personal and political levels. Consequently, it is a tragedy for those of us who study African themes that his impressions of the continent that has glorified him over generations as a symbol, martyr, and even father of liberation have not been made publicly available. Without question, the tour formed the cornerstone of Cuban policy for Africa, inciting the internationalist missions that took place in a dozen or more countries (including Algeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone, South

² Anderson, Jon Lee, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (London, etc.: Bantam Press, 1997), 95-6.

³ Guevara’s first visit to the African continent was a visit to newly-independent Algeria in July 1963.

Yemen, Syria, and Somalia) in the ensuing years, culminating in the epic military and humanitarian operations carried about by Cuban soldiers, military advisors, doctors, teachers, engineers, and others in the Angolan civil war.⁴ But travelling through Africa also captivated Guevara's romantic spirit. On the way back to Cuba from his Africa tour, Che held a conversation with intellectual and writer Roberto Fernández Retamar in which he confessed that Paris had held a strong attraction for him as a young man, but that that was before Africa.⁵

Representing the Revolution abroad in its first year, Guevara embarked on a whistle-stop tour of countries of major and minor interest (whether economically or politically), including the North African nations of Egypt and Morocco, as well as Sudan. However, the odyssey that interests us here took place between December 1964 and March 1965, involved multiple cities on the African continent, and seemed to have been, at least initially, inspired by a strong impulse to counter attempts by the new and old colonial powers to regain control of the Belgian Congo, including via the execution

⁴ Cuban involvement in Angola before and after independence has been well-documented in a number of works published inside and outside of the island, including: George, Edward, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale* (London & New York: Frank Cass, 2004), Gleijeses, Piero, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Gómez Chacón, César, *Cuito Cuanavale. Viaje al centro de los héroes* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), Hatzky, Christine, *Cubans in Angola: South-South Cooperation and Transfer of Knowledge, 1976-1991* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), Ortiz, José, *Angola: un abril como Girón* (Havana: Editora Política, 1979); Peters, Christabelle, *Cuban Identity and the Angolan Experience* (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and Valdés, Nelson, "Revolutionary Solidarity in Angola," in *Cuba in the World*, ed. Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 90-95.

⁵ Reid-Henry, Simon, *Fidel and Che: A Revolutionary Friendship* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 322).

of independence leader Patrice Lumumba. In later years, the tour would hold particular importance for establishing the blueprint of Havana's grandiose strategy-of-engagement on the African continent, since it was then that the first contact between a high-level representative of the Cuban government and numerous African liberation movements (including the MPLA) took place.⁶

During this era, the most radical leaders in the Organization of African Unity (OAU), known as the "Group of Six," were Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sékou Touré of Guinea, Modibo Keita of Mali, and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.⁷ Within this circle, Algeria, Guinea, and Tanzania were founding members of the OAU's Liberation Committee, which was established in Addis Ababa in May 1963 with the purpose of coordinating and assisting the

⁶ There is photographic evidence of Guevara's meeting with leaders of the MPLA at their exile headquarters in Brazzaville in December 1964 in Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 83. The author reports that Cuban military instructors were despatched to the Congo to train MPLA guerrilla fighters shortly thereafter (ibid).

⁷ It must be remembered that non-alignment formed one of the founding principles of the OAU. This position, in turn, informed one of its primary objectives which was the unification of all freedom fighters. Ben Bella and Nyerere famously held divergent views on the subject of unity, with the latter insisting that unification or a merger of nationalist parties necessarily leads to a more powerful liberation movement, while the former argued that unity was not a prerequisite (see Dube, Emmanuel M., "Relations Between Liberation Movements and the O.A.U." In *Essays on the Liberation of Southern Africa*, ed. N. M. Shamuyarira, (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1971), 43). In the case of Angola, Ben Bella asserted that insisting on a united front would be harmful to the struggle. Also, according to Dube (ibid, 45), the clash was likely influenced by differences in their personal experiences, and this suggestion seems very feasible. After all, liberation in Tanzania was achieved through constitutional means, meanwhile Algeria's two liberation movements endured a long and bitter war fought against the French.

continent's diverse array of independence movements. For a variety of reasons, including political stability and the existence of well-established links between the Communist countries and the liberation movements, which all had offices in the Tanzanian capital, Dar es Salaam was chosen as the Liberation Committee headquarters.

During his initial three-month tour, Che visited and consulted with all six of these "revolutionary" states, and were we to attempt to single out one particular nation or friendship for its influence upon his thinking at the time, our first instinct would perhaps be to indicate Algeria.⁸ Altogether, he spent over a month on an extensive tour of that country, developing a firm bond with former revolutionary fighter and first president Ahmed Ben Bella and thus hatching the major initiative in international politics that would become the foundation of Cuba's policy for Africa. It was in Algiers that Che planned out the remainder of his tour, and he later returned there to share his observations on the situation in Africa with Ben Bella, including his nascent plans to support the armed struggle in the Congo. We know that the Algerian president was set against Che's plans for the Congo, and he was supported in this view by Nasser. Ben Bella recalled that "the situation in black Africa was not comparable to that prevailing in our countries; Nasser and I, we warned Che of what might happen."⁹ Sources close to Guevara hold different opinions about the impact of Ben Bella's counsel. For instance,

⁸ By the time of Guevara's visit, Algeria had distinguished itself among the OAU states as a major supporter of African liberation movements. Indeed, Van Walraven (in Van Walraven, Klaas, *Dreams of Power: The Role of the Organization of African Unity in the Politics of Africa, 1963-1993* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 151.) asserts that Algerian "militancy on colonialism was accepted by, and provided the turning-point of" the OAU's founding conference.

⁹ Castaneda, Jorge G., *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) 283.

some claim that his resolve to go to the Congo had already started to wane towards the final days of his time in Algiers. However, all appear to agree that the week he spent in Tanzania was when the final, fateful decision was taken.¹⁰ This leads us to wonder what might have happened during the time he spent there. What significant event could have eclipsed the advice of his most trusted foreign ally?

We can search for clues to the mystery in Che's writings, this time in *The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo*, set down in Tanzania between December 1965 and January 1966, which start with the somber and foreboding words, "This is the history of a failure."¹¹ Guevara recounts the visit he had made in the previous year thus:

In a story of this kind, it is difficult to locate the first act. For narrative convenience, I shall take this to be a trip I made in Africa which gave me the opportunity to rub shoulders with many leaders of the various Liberation Movements. Particularly instructive was my visit to Dar es Salaam, where a considerable number of Freedom Fighters had taken up residence. Most of them lived comfortably in hotels and had made a veritable profession out of their situation, sometimes lucrative and nearly always agreeable. This was the setting for the interviews, in which they generally asked for military training in Cuba and financial assistance. It was nearly everyone's leitmotif.¹²

We can just picture the ascetic revolutionary sneering as he penned this damning portrait, and certainly the text that follows provides no evidence of an enlightening encounter or event taking place that could account for the hardening of purpose that witnesses agree took place during this period. Yet some important experience must have occurred. Outside of the "interviews" that Guevara described in the passage above, there

¹⁰ This conclusion is apparent in a number of biographical accounts, including in Anderson (1997), Castañeda (1997), Dosal (2003), and James (1970).

¹¹ Guevara, Ernesto, *The African Dream: The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo* (London: Harvill Press, 2001), 1.

¹² Guevara, *The African Dream*, 1.

was another meeting that appears only fleetingly in the records,¹³ but that I suspect had a far greater impact than we have been able to ascertain: the one that took place between the Argentine revolutionary and the Tanzanian leader, Julius Nyerere, who was known as "Mwalimu" (the teacher), in reference to his former profession, but also to his ability to impart deep learning. We know that Nyerere greeted Guevara at a reception held by Foreign Affairs Minister Oscar Kambona to welcome him to the country, and that the two men spoke.¹⁴ But what they talked about has not been reported. Still, I imagine that Che's observations were duly noted that night before sleep, or perhaps on the following morning before his talks at the hotels began in earnest. What would he have recorded?

Notes on a Native Son

One of the things that Che would have been struck and impressed by was Mwalimu's self-sacrificing disposition. He fasted on a regular basis and dressed modestly in a Mao tunic, eschewing the more flamboyant styles adopted by other African heads of state and thus matching the Argentine's preference for simple forms of attire. Also, unlike many of his contemporaries, Nyerere did not siphon off his nation's wealth for personal gain. He was considered by many to possess a nobility of spirit that Che would have admired. Finally, like Guevara, Nyerere was drawn towards policies of collectivization and guerrilla warfare influenced by the People's Republic of China

¹³ Examples include: Azaria Mbughuni, "Why Did Che Guevara Come to Tanzania Secretly? Part One," *Business Times*, Friday, 19 September 2014, accessed June 7, 2015; Richard L. Harris, *Che Guevara: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 122; Roberto Occhi, *Che Guevara: La Più Completa Biografia* (Baiso, Reggio Emilia: Verdechiaro Edizioni, 2007), 209.

¹⁴ See Mwakikagile, Godfrey, *Congo in the Sixties* (Dar es Salaam: New Africa Press, 2014), 188, and Mbughuni, "Why Did Che Guevara."

under Mao Zedong.¹⁵ In the 1970s, he would introduce a policy of collectivization in the country's agricultural system known as *ujamaa*.

The two men also shared a similar social philosophy. Although it was not until 1967 that Nyerere issued the Arusha Declaration, which outlined in detail the concept of *ujamaa* (alternatively translated as “unity,” “oneness,” or “familyhood”) that came to dominate his policies, he had already started publishing ideas on traditional African socialism¹⁶ that would certainly have struck a chord with the architect of the concept of Cuba’s “New Man,” who wrote poetic verse in his military fatigues. Indeed, it was from Tanzania that Guevara filed his article “El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba” to the

¹⁵ Beijing had helped to build a railroad from Tanzania to the Atlantic coast and Premier Zhou Enlai visited Dar es Salaam in October 1965.

¹⁶ In addition to Nyerere, the African independence leaders most associated with the concept of African socialism were Léopold Senghor of Senegal, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Sékou Touré of Guinea. The participation of Senghor, whose political viewpoint and economic strategies differed quite widely from the others, highlights the cultural vision of African socialism as an antidote to corrosive Western/European values, which resonated with prevailing and influential ideas of ‘negritude.’ As a guiding influence to policy, the term has been defined differently according to local conditions and the subjective interpretation of those in power; however, in the main, it is understood as a collection of practices rooted in traditional African principles of the extended family system. *Ujamaa* is the Swahili word for ‘extended family.’ In its starkest terms, it promotes collectivism, sharing and the community over (Western/European) individualism, self-interest and greed.

Since Nkrumah was the first of the four leaders to declare independence, he is often assumed to be the chief architect of African Socialism, and the others as following in his footsteps; however it is perhaps more useful to think in terms of an Afro-centric *zeitgeist* that influenced the heads of some of the first sub-Saharan African countries to be liberated.

Uruguayan newspaper *Marcha*, which published it on March 12, 1965, and evokes for the first time the concept of “el hombre nuevo.”¹⁷

In a 1962 pamphlet with the title “Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism,” Nyerere had written the following:

Socialism—like democracy—is an attitude of mind. In a socialist society it is the socialist attitude of mind, and not the rigid adherence to a standard political pattern, which is needed to ensure that the people care for each other’s welfare....In traditional African society *everybody* was a worker. There was no other way of earning a living for the community. Even the Elder, who appeared to be enjoying himself without doing any work and for whom everybody else appeared to be working, had, in fact, worked hard all his younger days. The wealth he now appeared to possess was not *his* personally; it was only “his” as the Elder of the group which had produced it. He was its guardian....When I say that in traditional African society everybody was a worker, I do not use the word “worker” simply as opposed to “employer” but also as opposed to “loiterer” or “idler.” One of the most socialistic achievements of our society was the sense of security it gave to its members, and the universal hospitality on which they could rely. But it is too often forgotten, nowadays, that the basis of this great socialistic achievement was this: that it was taken for granted that every member of society—barring only the children and the infirm—contributed his fair share of effort towards the production of wealth.¹⁸

Imagine for one moment the impact of those sentiments on the moralistic revolutionary who in a series of speeches and essays—including the above-mentioned “Socialism and Man”—would try to build a logical case for a new work ethic:

In order for it to develop in culture, work must acquire a new condition; man as commodity ceases to exist and a system is established that grants a quota for the fulfillment of social duty....Man begins to free his thought from the bothersome fact that presupposed the need to satisfy his animal needs by working. He begins to see himself portrayed in his work and to understand its human magnitude through the created object, through the work carried out....[This] signifies an emanation from himself, a contribution to the life of society in which he is reflected, the fulfillment of his social duty.¹⁹

¹⁷ Guevara, Ernesto, “El socialismo y el hombre Nuevo en Cuba.” In *El socialismo y el hombre Nuevo en Cuba* (Mexico, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno, 1979), 7.

¹⁸ Nyerere, Julius K., “Ujamaa,” 3.

¹⁹ Guevara, Ernesto, *Socialism and Man in Cuba and Other Works* (London: Stage 1, 1968), 13.

Then perhaps later on, over cigars, the two men might have talked over the opinions that Nyerere had summarized towards the end of the same pamphlet:

We in Africa, have no more need of being "converted" to socialism than we have of being "taught" democracy. Both are rooted in our own past—in the traditional society which produced us. Modern African socialism can draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of "society" as an extension of the basic family unit. But it can no longer confine the idea of the social family within the limits of the tribe, nor, indeed, of the nation. For no true African socialist can look at a line drawn on a map and say, "The people on this side of that line are my brothers, but those who happen to live on the other side of it can have no claim on me": every individual on this continent is his brother.²⁰

It's possible that Guevara, his eyes shining with the excitement that came from encountering a kindred spirit at the end of his long journey, began shortly afterwards to sketch out what is considered to be one of the most important speeches in his career, which he delivered on February 24, 1965, at the Second Economic Seminar of the Organization of Afro-Asian Solidarity held in Algiers. In it he maintained, "Socialism cannot exist without a change in consciousness resulting in a new fraternal attitude toward humanity, both at an individual level, within the societies where socialism is being built or has been built, and on a world scale, with regard to all peoples suffering from imperialist oppression. We believe the responsibility of aiding dependent countries must be approached in such a spirit."²¹

The difference in language before and after the African journey cannot be overlooked. In his speech before the United Nations on December 11, 1964, prior to embarking on the Africa tour, we find such phrases as, "We express our solidarity

²⁰ Nyerere, Julius K., "Ujamaa," 9.

²¹ Guevara, Ernest, *Che Guevara Speaks: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Charlottesville: Merit Publishers, 1967), 127.

with,”²² “the maintenance of internal unity, faith in one’s own destiny,”²³ and so on. Similarly, in an interview with the widow of Frantz Fanon, Josie Fanon, which appeared in the December 26, 1964, issue of *Révolution Africaine*, at no time do we find expressions related to spirituality or emotional/familial ties. First of all, Che explained one of the reasons for his visit to be the occasion to discuss African problems with the “compañeros” of the Algerian government. He then went on to present his analysis of the African situation in impersonal, strategic terms, pointing out the possibilities and dangers for the fight against imperialism. Without direct experience of living among the African peoples that he was discussing, the conversation appeared clinical and completely impersonal. This contrasted with his response to a question about revolution in Latin America. He answered, “You know, that is something close to my heart; it’s my keenest interest.”²⁴ The language seems to reflect a sense of (be)longing or identity.

With this view in mind, let us consider Algiers a couple of months later, on his way back from Tanzania, and the way that Che began his speech to the Organization of Afro-Asian Solidarity: “Dear brothers.” And then, continuing on, “It is not by accident that our delegation is permitted to give its opinion here, in the circle of the peoples of Asia and Africa.”²⁵ Surely, the overlap with Nyerere’s thinking could not have been accidental either. The meeting appears to have reignited a transcendental line of thinking that Che had shown after his first official overseas tour, as previously mentioned in an article published in the September–October 1960 issue of *Humanismo*

²² Guevara, Ernesto, *Che: The Diaries of Ernesto Che Guevara* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2009), 102.

²³ Guevara, *Che*, 100.

²⁴ Guevara, *Che Guevara Speaks*, 105.

²⁵ Guevara, *Che Guevara Speaks*, 106.

with the title "America from the Afro-Asian Balcony." "Might it not be," he asked, "that our fraternity can defy the breadth of the seas, the rigors of language and the lack of cultural ties, to lose ourselves in the embrace of a fellow struggler?"²⁶ He went on, "I must say...to all the millions of Afro-Asians that...I am one brother more, one more among the multitudes of brothers in this part of the world that awaits with infinite anxiety the moment [when we can] consolidate the bloc that will destroy, once and for all, the anachronistic presence of colonial domination."²⁷ Such expressions became muted as time went on, but they carry the seeds of the Latin-African identity that Fidel Castro famously formulated over a decade later to explain the Cuban military mission in Angola.²⁸

It was in this same speech in Algiers that Guevara gave voice to the opinions that appeared to indicate a political rift between himself and Fidel.²⁹ It turned out also to

²⁶ Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 457.

²⁷ Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 457-8.

²⁸ Prior to Castro's December 22, 1975 speech, discourses of cultural identity in Cuba had always been framed within a broader Latin American (but Eurocentric) context that highlighted linguistic ties, a Spanish cultural heritage, and a shared history of independence wars against Imperial Spain. However, on that day, for the first time outside of a folkloric/anthropological framework, the Cuban leader made the striking claim that "nosotros no solo somos un país latinoamericano, sino que somos también un país latinoaficano" (we are not only a Latin American country but also a Latin African country).

²⁹ It is hard to ascertain the extent or even the existence of any disagreement between Castro and Guevara. If, on the one hand, Fidel's public attitude towards the Soviet Union was guided by pragmatism and a necessary restraint in the face of a complicated relationship, then it's possible that Che was simply giving voice to prevailing but closely guarded opinions. However, the same outspokenness could be viewed as condemnation of his old friend if their divergent reactions are taken at face value. Readers

be a farewell of sorts because it was his final appearance before disappearing from public view—prior to secretly entering the Congo. In Algiers, Che accused the Soviet Union of not doing enough for the developing nations, Cuba in particular, and (even worse) of colluding with imperialism: “The socialist countries have the moral duty to end their tacit complicity with the Western exploiting countries.”³⁰ To be sure, an inherent moralism had always prevailed in Guevara’s political thinking, but what is significant is how pronounced it became following his stay in Tanzania. The conclusion must be drawn that a change had taken place. Soon after the speech, Guevara was denounced as “the apple of discord in the socialist front” in the Havana daily newspaper *Hoy*.³¹

Aside from Nyerere, no other African leader of the time was devising the affective principles of revolutionary socialism. Likewise, it was only Che Guevara who openly declared that the true revolutionary was guided by strong feelings of love. In fact, he said, “It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality.”³² Therefore, we can envision that the idea that Africans possessed a predisposition towards the social consciousness that he espoused as a condition of

might find much of interest regarding the complex political and personal relationship between the two men in Simon Reid Henry’s engaging study *Fidel and Che: A Revolutionary Friendship*.

³⁰ James, Daniel, *Che Guevara: A Biography* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 132. At the time of the speech, Moscow was at the height of its ‘peaceful coexistence’ phase of its international politics, which included signing trade agreements with several ‘anti-communist’ Latin American nations. At his UN speech on December 11, 1964, Guevara made clear, “As Marxists we have maintained that peaceful coexistence among nations does not encompass coexistence between the exploiters and the exploited, between the oppressors and the oppressed...” (Guevara, 2000: 117).

³¹ James, *Che Guevara*, 132.

³² Guevara, *Socialism and Man*, 19-20.

correct ideological development, and which permitted them to make sacrifices and take political action "naturally" out of feelings of solidarity, carried immense psychic power for an idealistic and romantic dreamer such as Che.³³ We can imagine that immersion in this dream of natural African socialism, however brief, may have been just the transformative experience required to make everything that happened subsequently predictable. He resigned from his post as Minister of Industry several months after returning from his African tour in the famous letter of farewell addressed to his great friend, Fidel, which included the declaration: "I renounce formally my positions in the leadership of the party, my post as minister, my rank as *Comandante*, my status as Cuban citizen."³⁴

Historian Azaria Mbughuni claims that Guevara actually visited Tanzania three times, once openly and twice in secret, between February and November of 1965, spending, in total, over four months in the East African nation.³⁵ Although, for the purpose of the present exposition, I have chosen to circumscribe the time frame for the imagined conversation to the period of the official visit, the potential for multiple conversations between Guevara and Nyerere to have been held over an extended period further expands the possibility for the latter's influence upon the former.

Awakenings

In the case of both Nyerere and Guevara, however, the dream proved to be nothing more than a dream. First, the Congo mission culminated in disaster, and

³³ Although the essentialism inherent in negritude has been debated and criticized since its early stages by Richard Wright and others, we cannot ignore the lyrically persuasive elements in this pro-African (if not anti-Western) and anticolonial cultural politics.

³⁴ James, *Che Guevara*, 154.

³⁵ Mbughuni, "Why Did Che Guevara."

Guevara laid some of the blame with the Tanzanian government, which, because of the agreements reached at a meeting of African presidents in Accra, decided to end its assistance to the Congolese National Liberation Army, the guerilla front Guevara had endeavored to assist. Moreover, although Nyerere had sought for his nation both self-reliance and financial independence from Western creditors, while he was president, Tanzania went from being Africa's largest exporter of food to its biggest importer. However, he made the decision to step down in 1985 rather than cling to power in the face of defeat. Certainly, his economic development policies inflicted hardship and distress on his countrymen, but few doubt his integrity and good intentions. And amidst the ruins of Nyerere's economic reforms, other policies, such as in literacy and health care, are acknowledged to have flourished and even proved exemplary among African nations.³⁶ Even after the failure of his socialist experiment, he retained, according to a *Guardian* obituary from 1999, his "worldwide moral authority."³⁷

In a similar vein, not a single one of the economic goals that Che elaborated was achieved by Cuba. As Daniel James damningly reported a few years after Guevara's death, while he was Minister of Industries, the country had registered declines in every sector forecast to increase, and by the end of his term, the Cuban economy was actually less productive than under Batista.³⁸ However, like his political and spiritual ally, Nyerere, he did not seek to hold on to power when his plans failed.

Che was an international revolutionary before he arrived in Cuba to fight in the 26th of July Movement. He expanded his horizons from the Americas until they

³⁶ Julius Nyerere, "Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere – Biography" (2015), accessed June 11, 2015.

³⁷ The Guardian, "Julius Nyerere" (1999), accessed June 19, 2015.

³⁸ James, *Che Guevara*, 139.

encompassed the entire developing world through his Tricontinental strategy—the attempt to organize a covert network of guerrilla operations linking La Paz, Havana, Algiers, Brazzaville, Dar es Salaam, Prague, Moscow, and Beijing. But the odds were stacked heavily against this idealized vision. What I have tried to show in this essay is that, during his African travels, the "sleeping" internationalist had been reawakened out of his ministerial slumber by the impossible dream of revolutionary *ujamaa*. If, as Richard Bjornson has written, the estrangement and alienation that comes from overseas travel inspires a reconstitution of identity “in light of new knowledge and expanding horizons,”³⁹ then Nyerere’s utopian dreams helped Guevara to recover values and perspectives that affirmed his sense of self and gave meaning to his life narrative. “And let us develop a true proletarian internationalism,” he urged the Tricontinental Congress from Bolivia in 1967. “The flag under which we fight would be the sacred cause of redeeming humanity. To die under the flag of Vietnam, of Venezuela, of Guatemala, of Laos, of Guinea, of Colombia, of Bolivia—to name only a few scenes of today’s armed struggle—would be equally glorious and desirable for an American, an Asian, an African, even a European.”⁴⁰

Coda: The Pan-African Dream

The cultural politics that I refer to as Latin-Africanism can be considered as a uniquely Cuban form of the Pan-Africanism that had drawn dreamers of a new African reality to Tanzania in the 1960s. It combined the political principles of anti-imperialism,

³⁹ Bjornson, Richard, “Alienation and Disalienation: Themes of Yesterday, Promises of Tomorrow.” In *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 148.

⁴⁰ Guevara, Ernesto, *The Secret Papers of a Revolutionary: The Diary of Che Guevara* (Mattituck, NY: American Reprint Company, 1975), 15.

antiracism, and social revolution with an added cultural imperative that gained moral sustenance from the historical ties between the Caribbean nation and the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa. Within the framework of the Latin-African identity that Fidel Castro claimed for his nation in November 1975, the decision to send thousands of Cuban soldiers to fight in defense of the government of Agostinho Neto against the allied enemy forces of UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola), American mercenaries, and apartheid South Africa sprang not only from preexisting political ties with the ruling Marxist MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) but also from blood ties inherited from a slaving past. According to this narrative, ingrained in a country that had been built upon the bodily sacrifice of enslaved Africans was the moral responsibility to come to the defense of an African nation being threatened by racist and imperialist forces—particularly when the arrayed enemies put into equal peril a nascent socialist revolution.

However, as I have explained elsewhere,⁴¹ due to the continuation of racial inequalities in Cuba after the promises of the Revolution (including a predominantly white political administration), Latin-Africanism performed a double duty, standing in this sense inside the Freudian model of the dream as catharsis. In other words, it represented a strategy to purge past history to redeem the present social reality. In an incongruous twist to the revolutionary state's earlier project to eradicate African-derived religions as vestiges of the nation's colonial past, to which Alejandro De La Fuente refers in his contribution to this volume, these same spiritual practices (Palo Monte, Santería, Abakua, and so on) now comprised the bedrock of *africanía* upon which Cuba's Latin-African cultural identity was purportedly to be built.

⁴¹ Peters, *Cuban Identity*.

Nevertheless, even in its potential contradictions—and keeping in mind the framing of the present collection of essays around “culture as a central axis of interpretation”—I would suggest that Cuba’s Latin-African identity can be understood as an offshoot of the major Pan-African sensibility that was forged among black intellectuals in the post-WWII years, manifested most saliently in the Paris-based cultural institution, magazine, and publishing house *Présence Africaine*. The First Congress of Black Writers and Artists was held in Paris at the Sorbonne in 1956, a historic meeting that was organized and sponsored jointly by *Présence Africaine* and its newly created affiliate, the Société Africaine de Culture (SAC).

In his incisive essay on the study of identity in cultural studies, Lawrence Grossberg reminds us that “the modern is not merely defined by the logics of difference and individuality; it is also built upon a logic of temporality.”⁴² Not only that, but, continues Grossberg, “at the heart of modern thought and power lie two assumptions: that space and time are separable, and that time is more fundamental than space.”⁴³ The natural consequence of this privileging of time over space was the conceptualizing of identity as “entirely an historical construction.”⁴⁴ This understanding is clearly recognizable in the strong historical focus of the Paris meeting. In his opening remarks, Senegalese writer and co-founder of *Présence Africaine*, Alioune Diop, contextualized the conference as an interruption and contestation of History “with a capital h” that had been the exclusive preserve of the Western World. It was, he suggested, a first assault

⁴² Grossberg, Lawrence, “Identity and Cultural Studies – Is That All There Is?” In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London, etc.: Sage, 1996), 100.

⁴³ Grossberg, “Identity and Cultural Studies,” 100.

⁴⁴ Grossberg, “Identity and Cultural Studies,” 100.

by the “peoples without history” against imperialist and racist interpretations of their pasts, and, above all, a revalorization of their original cultures and ancient civilizations:

Thus, we, colonized peoples, are prevented from exulting in our classics, from revalorizing them for the purpose of our present situation, and denied the freedom to imagine a future in proportion to our love of the world. Under such conditions, the present is reduced to an uncertain period beset by the most ridiculous states of confusion and distress.⁴⁵

The first thing that we note is that the call for a return to the classics did not arise out of some vainglorious exercise in nostalgia, but was tied up with the urgent and compelling need to respond to the modern age’s current “crisis of identity.” What place existed for those denied any form of subjectivity (whether individual or collective) and, by extension, any possibility of agency, in a world of change, splintering, and fragmentation? Without the sustenance of the past, Diop and the other advocates of negritude claimed, the future held nothing but annihilation. The seeds of this annihilation had been sown in the past by the transatlantic slave trade, which at the same time comprised the historical antecedent binding together the diverse group of delegates from Africa, Europe, and the Americas who had assembled in Paris:

Over centuries, the dominant event in our history was the slave trade. This is the first link between us, delegates, which justifies our meeting here. Black people from the United States, the Caribbean, and the African continent, whatever the distance that sometimes separates our spiritual worlds, we have this undeniably in common, that we are descended from the same ancestors.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ “Ainsi donc le culte de nos classiques, leur revalorisation en fonction de notre situation présente, sont refusés aux peuples colonisés, en même temps que la liberté de penser un avenir à la mesure de leur amour du monde. Dans ces conditions, le présent se réduit à une période informe caractérisée par le désarroi, la détresse absurdes.” Diop, Alioune, “Discours d’ouverture,” *Présence Africaine: Revue Culturelle du Monde Noir* 8-9 (1956): 13-14

⁴⁶ “Pendant des siècles, l’événement dominant de notre histoire a été la traite des esclaves. C’est le premier lien entre nous, Congressistes, qui justifie notre réunion ici. Noirs des Etats-Unis, des Antilles et du continent Africain, quelle que soit la distance qui sépare parfois nos univers spirituels, nous avons

We recognize this discourse of the common ancestor as one of the principal logics of temporality involved in the construction of identity, not only in the *Présence Africaine* project but also in the later framing of Latin-Africa at a crisis point in Cuban history.⁴⁷ In this way, slaving history became a resource “in the process of becoming rather than being”⁴⁸—so that we might regard Latin-Africanism, in its essence, as a dream.⁴⁹

The problem for many of the delegates to the Paris conference hailing from the Americas, however, was that the institution and administration of African enslavement in their nations had rested upon a color-caste system that subsumed both ethnicity and culture to race, with the consequence that black history could not be separated from slave culture. Not only that, but for others, such as Cuban intellectual and historian Walterio Carbonell, the Pan-Africanist link between subjectivity (culture) and agency (politics) was obstructed by the dominant (and historical) belief system of *mestizaje* (mixedness), which tied racial awareness to racial discrimination. For black Cubans

ceci d'incontestablement commun que nous descendons des mêmes ancêtres.” Diop, “Discours d’ouverture,” 9.

⁴⁷ See Peters, *Cuban Identity* for an in-depth analysis of the cultural politics at play during the first five years of the Cuban mission in the Angolan War.

⁴⁸ Hall, Stuart, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London, etc.: Sage, 1996), 4.

⁴⁹ It is important to highlight that Latin-Africa comprised the *cultural* side of the Cuban mission in Angola, which I trace back to Guevara coming under the influence of Pan-African ideas. However, Operation Carlota demonstrated the major shift in the *political* strategy of Havana’s policy for Africa, in other words a rejection of the guerrilla cell (*foco*) for conventional, large-scale military engagement.

especially, organizing on the basis of race had historically drawn charges of *promoting* racial division rather than seeking redress.⁵⁰

Nor did the 1959 Revolution succeed in dislodging a nationalist ideology of “racelessness” that can be traced back to the writings of Cuban apostle José Martí during the independence movement of the late 1800s, such as “Mi raza” (“My race”).⁵¹ (“Cuban is more than black, more than white, more than mulatto,” he famously wrote.) Instead, Martí’s ideas were revalorized to promote national unity in the face of real and perceived threats to the new society from forces within and outside of the country in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵² Thus, one consequence of the contradictory policy of inhibiting political organization around the experience of racism internally while encouraging cultural identification with Africa was a projection of the post-revolutionary phenomenon of “*la doble cara*”⁵³ (two-facedness) into the international arena. This left the government open to charges of hypocrisy and duplicity, particularly in view of Havana’s open and vociferous support for black liberationists in the United States, at

⁵⁰ The fate of the Independent Party of Color in 1912 offers the most extreme example of the consequences of race-based political organization in pre-revolutionary Cuba. See: Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁵¹ José Martí, “Mi Raza,” *Patria*, April 16, 1893. See: Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁵² See: Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth Century-Cuba* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 259-316; Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 151-157, 265-278.

⁵³ The term refers to the practice of maintaining an outer compliance with the tenets of revolution while privately maintaining oppositional or alternative opinions.

the same time that possibilities for similar forms of activism were restricted at home.⁵⁴

It is a sad but telling irony that Cuba's preeminent Africanist, Armando Entralgo, was himself a victim of this conflict between internal racism and external Africentrism when his marriage to a black Angolan, Olga Lima, whom he had met during his tour of duty as ambassador to Ghana, became the subject of consternation upon returning to his homeland after the military coup against Nkrumah in 1966. According to his widow, Leonor Amaro, Olga returned to Angola following that country's independence and became active in the Angolan Women's Union (Unión das Mulheres Angolanas/UMA).⁵⁵ In light, moreover, of Cuba's intensified ties to the Soviet bloc in the 1970s (see Cabrera Arús, and Bustamante in this volume), Latin-Africanism projected externally may have had the ancillary effect of counterbalancing (or even obscuring) the simultaneous cultural, political, and economic "Sovietizations" of Cuban society within.

But such criticism overlooks the duality intrinsic to Pan-Africanism, and that is manifest in the foundational rationale for the OAU itself, involving an external part that asserted an "African personality" and anti-colonialism, and an internal element that

⁵⁴ Perhaps the best-known example of this kind of indictment is: Carlos Moore in *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa* (Berkeley: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1988). On early connections between African American political movements and Cuba, see: Devyn Spence Benson, "Cuba Calls: African American Tourism, Race, and the Cuban Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 93:2 (2013): 239-271.

⁵⁵ I learned this information from a one-hundred-and-ninety-one-page unpublished memoir of Entralgo written by Amaro as an introduction to a future collected volume of his writings. Leonor Amaro, "Entralgo en el recuerdo" (unpublished manuscript), 62.

stressed cooperation, (re)conciliation, and cohesiveness.⁵⁶ More than politicians, it was poets, artists, and writers (and, as we know, some revolutionary leaders were both) who were able to galvanize these dual directives most effectively—that is to say, those who, like Che Guevara, dreamed with the dawn.⁵⁷

*Tangem sinos na madrugada
vai nascer o sol.*

[The bells toll as day breaks
The sun is on the rise.]⁵⁸

-Agostinho Neto (first president of the Republic of Angola)

⁵⁶ It is a matter of some relevance to our affective analysis that in his comprehensive study of the OAU, political scientist, Klaas van Walraven, explicitly defines pan-Africanism to be “a collection of ideas and emotions” (in van Walraven, *Dreams of Power*, 85.)

⁵⁷ Congolese historian, Jean-Michel Mabeko Tali, has written that pan-Africanism’s greatest influence on the future leaders of the independent Portuguese African nations (Amilcar Cabral, Lucio Lara, Mario Pinto de Andrade, Marcelino dos Santos, etc.) was intellectual (see Mabeko Tali, Jean-Michel, “Um Olhar sobre O “Outro” Lúcio,” *Tchiweka: 80 anos – Testemunhos*, 2008, accessed August 10, 2015), since it expounded a unifying theory of a shared civilization.

⁵⁸ Neto, Agostinho, *Amanhecer*, Fundação António Agostinho Neto (2012), accessed August 10, 2015.